DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 334 754 EC 300 500

AUTHOR Stile, Stephen W.; And Others
TITLE Post-Preschool Placement of Young Students with Developmental Disabilities Exiting Public Special Education Preschool Programs. Final Report.
SPONS AGENCY New Mexico State Dept. of Education, Santa Fe. Div. of Special Education.
PUB DATE Feb 91
NOTE 26p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Decision Making; *Developmental Disabilities; Longitudinal Studies; *Mainstreaming; Preschool Education; Primary Education; *Special Classes; Student Placement; Trend Analysis
IDENTIFIERS New Mexico

ABSTRACT

This study investigated initial placements, current placements, and stability of placements for 1,646 graduates of special education preschool programs for 3- and 4-year-olds with developmental disabilities from 61 New Mexico school districts. Subjects graduated in four waves from 1986-87 through 1989-90. Major findings were that 10 percent of the graduates were initially placed in regular education, 40 percent in regular education with support, and 43 percent in self-contained classrooms. Current placements indicated slight shifts to 15 percent in regular education, 33 percent in regular education with support, and 53 percent in self-contained classrooms. Overall, the stability rate was 90 percent. Six recommendations are made, including: (1) increase the number of placements in regular education or regular education with support; (2) increase the number of mainstreamed or integrated preschool settings; (3) place students in regular education with support in cases of doubt; (4) "red-flag" files of children placed in special education for "1 more year"; (5) initiate a "tracking system" across New Mexico districts; and (6) pursue funding needed to continue the preschool longitudinal study. Includes nine references. (Author/DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED334754

Post-Preschool Placement of Young Students with Developmental Disabilities Exiting Public Special Education Preschool Programs

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A Final Report submitted to the State Department of Education, Special Education Unit

(1989 Sec. 619 Preschool Award)

Stephen W. Stile

Brenda Hudson

June LeCrone

New Mexico State University

February 1991

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Stephen W Stile

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

This project was funded by a discretionary grant from the New Mexico Department of Education, Special Education Unit.

EC 300570

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Abstract

This study investigated initial placements, current placements and stability of placements for 1,646 graduates of special education preschool programs for three- and four-year olds with developmental disabilities from 61 New Mexico school districts. Subjects graduated in four waves or "panels" from 1986-87 (the first year of special education preschool programming in New Mexico) through 1989-90. Major findings were that 10% of the graduates were initially placed in regular education, 40% in regular education with support (A- and B-level) and 43% in self-contained classrooms (C- and D-level). Current placements indicated slight shifts to 15% in regular education, 33% in regular education with support and 53% in self-contained classrooms. Overall, the stability rate was 90%. Given large numbers of self-contained placements, high stability and high attrition of subjects, six specific recommendations are made for future programming/study.

Post-Preschool Placement of Young Students with Developmental Disabilities Exiting Public Special Education Preschool Programs

In recent years, outcome evaluation of programs for young children with developmental disabilities has addressed several divergent variables. These variables include: child change (Bricker & Sheehan, 1981); teacher performance (Lazzari & Bruder, 1988); family interaction (Rosenberg & Robinson, 1988) and cost effectiveness (Wood, 1981).

Another variable, and one that is infrequently used is post-preschool placement (Edgar, McNulty, Gaetz, & Maddox, 1984). As Bricker (1989) has stated,

> Conducting follow-up or longitudinal research is an arduous task reflected by the paucity of studies contained in the literature. . . . Methodological and design problems. . .create barriers to the conduct of longitudinal research, and most likely these problems are compounded by the passage of time during which a complex array of variables may change and become realigned. Nonetheless, there continues to be a significant need for longitudinal studies on organically impaired populations (p. 80).

The purpose of the research reported here was to investigate (a) initial placements, (b) current placements and (c) stability of placements for graduates of public special education preschool programs. Results for these three major areas of investigation are reported below.

Method

Subjects and Setting

New Mexico subjects include all 1646 children who graduated from special education preschool programs in 61 districts during 1986-1987 (the first year of programming for four-year-olds in New Mexico), 1987-1988, 1988-1989, and 1989-90 school years. All 19 independent school districts and 10 regional center cooperatives were requested to participate. Eight of 10 (81%) regional center cooperatives participated and 17 out of 19 (89%) independent school districts agreed to participate, for a total of 69% district participation (see Figures 1 and 2).

Insert Figures 1 and 2 about here

All subjects met eligibility criteria for students with developmental disabilities in New Mexico and were between the ages of three and five. Children were considered graduates when they were placed out of preschool or reached the age of five by September 1st of a given school year. Table 1 contains demographic information on subjects.

Insert Table 1 about here

Procedures

A data collector from each independent school district or regional center cooperative recorded data on a protocol adapted from the Early Childhood Follow Along Study protocol used in a previous longitudinal study (Edgar, Heggelund & Fischer, 1988) conducted in the state of Washington. Data collectors were school personnel who had been or were presently involved with the district's special education program. Workshops were conducted throughout the state in order to train data collectors who had not been previously trained. Data collectors received instruction in use of the form and were instructed to call the project office if any clarification was needed during data collection.

For each graduate, the data collector recorded demographic data, current handicapping condition, initial educational placement and current educational placement. Initial and current placement data were recorded for 1986-1987, 1987-1988, and 1988-1989 graduates. To date, only initial placement data have been collected for 1989-1990 graduates.

Results

Initial Placements

Initial placements for New Mexico graduates are described in Table 2. Data are presented for 1614 graduates from preschool programs in 61 of 88 (69%) participating

school districts. One hundred sixty (10%) of the graduates were placed in regular classroom settings, 646 (40%) in regular education with support (A or B Level) and 692 (43%) in self-contained classrooms (C or D Level). An additional 116 (7%) students were in other non-specified placements.

Table 2 indicates that of initial placements after preschool, 7% of those graduates were classified as students with mild mental disabilities, 59% were classified as students with mild disabilities, (BD, CD, LD), and 34% were students with other disabilities (e.g., physically impaired). Thus, despite the fact that two-thirds were considered mildly handicapped upon leaving preschool, only one-half of the total population of graduates was initially placed in regular education or regular education with support.

Insert Table 2 about here

Current Placements

As indicated in Figure 3, 15% of New Mexico preschool graduates are currently in regular classroom settings with no special education services. Thirty-two and a half percent are in regular education classrooms with some special education support (e.g., a resource room). Fifty-two and a half percent are currently found in self-contained

classrooms. Further breakdowns of data for current placements are described in Figure 4 and Table 3.

Insert Figures 3 and 4 about here

Table 3 indicates current placements of New Mexico graduates by handicapping condition. As shown, the two largest categories of graduates currently placed in special education are children with communication disorders (CD) and children with multiple impairments (MI). While almost twice as many CD graduates are currently placed in A-level and B-level programs (resource room) than in self-contained classrooms, most children with multiple impairments are currently placed in self-contained (D-level) programs. D-level programs are the most frequent placements for graduates. The most infrequent placement for graduates is C-level (special education classroom with some integration).

Insert Table 3 about here

Of graduates with mild handicaps, 61% of children with behavior disorders, 37% of children with communication disorders, and 66% of children with learning disabilities are currently placed in self-contained classrooms. Students with communication disorders make up 82% of A-level programs, 70% of B-level programs, 40% of C-level programs,

and 27% of D-level programs. Table 3 indicates that the majority of all preschool graduates, with the exception of those with hearing impairments and communication disorders, are currently placed in self-contained classrooms.

Although data on initial placements were gathered on 1,614 students, current placement data are available for only 864. This high attrition rate (46%) is due to various factors. For example, one-fourth can be attributed to student mobility as indicated on data collection forms. Therefore, although many preschool graduates may still be attending New Mexico schools, they have been lost as subjects for the longitudinal study.

Stability of Placements

Stability of initial placements has been identified as an important variable in the literature (Edgar et al., 1988; Guralnick & Bennett, 1987). As Guralnick & Bennett (1987) described it:

> Although movement from setting to setting can occur at any point in the child's life, experience suggests that the expectations of teachers and parents are likely to be highly correlated with the initial placement decision....Failure to intervene early to ensure the least restrictive nature of this initial placement will surely have life long consequences (p. 18).

When stability of placement was examined, it was determined that 90% of New Mexico graduates remained in their original placement. In other words, most students

initially placed in regular education remained in regular education. Most students placed in special education remained in special education, but not necessarily at the same level. Of the 10% whose placement did change, 17 of 91 (18.7%) students whose initial placement was regular education are now in special education. Of those whose initial placement was special education, 67 of 849 (7.9%) are now in regular education. The percentage of students moving to special education is more than twice the percentage of students moving to regular education.

Summary and Recommendations

This study examined initial placements, current placements and stability of placements for graduates of public special education preschool programs in New Mexico. Major findings for initial placements are that 10% graduated to regular classroom settings; 40% to regular education with support (A & B levels), 43% to self-contained classrooms and 7% to other placements. For current placements, 15% are in regular classroom settings with no support, 32.5% percent are in regular education classrooms with some support and 52.5% are in self-contained classrooms. Stability of placement was 90%. When movement did occur, it occured more often from regular to special education (19%) than from special to regular education (8%). Very little movement occurred <u>between</u> placement options (e.g., from BD to LD).

Current placement statistics do not include those for (46%) of the initial graduates who have been lost to attrition. However, examination of data for lost graduates has not revealed significant differences between the two groups across major variables.

Results of this study appear consistent with the Washington follow-up studies conducted by Edgar, et al. (1988). In Washington, 14% of the graduates were initially placed in regular education, 22% in regular education with some support and 64% placed in self-contained settings. Taken together, placements appeared to be very stable in the states of Washington and New Mexico with stability ranging from 75% to 100%. In addition, results of the latest year (1989-90) of the study are consistent with results from previous years.

The following 6 recommendations have emerged to date from the continuing study of preschool graduates in New Mexico:

1. Given the large number (66%) of self-contained placements for students with mild disabilities following graduation, the number of placements in regular education or regular education with support for these students should be increased;

2. Given the large number (43%) of self-contained placements immediately following graduation, the number of mainstreamed or integrated preschool settings should be increased;

3. Given the high stability rate (90%), children should be placed in regular education or regular education with support instead of C/D programs if any doubt exists regarding the most appropriate setting;

4. Given the high stability rate, files for students placed in special education programs upon graduation when such placement is considered to be for "one more year" should be "red-flagged";

5. Given the high attrition rate (40%) for preschool graduates, a "tracking system" should be initiated across New Mexico districts; and

6. Given recent 619 priorities, other funding sources should be pursued in order to continue the preschool longitudinal study.

Regarding recommendation number two, Baum and Wells (1985) have found that children begin to form attitudes about people with disabilities at age four. This suggests that integrated or mainstreamed preschool programs may be beneficial for both students with and without disabilities relative to development of positive attitudes. Currently, however, 63.8% of the state's preschool programs are classified as center-based.

Insert Figure 5 about here

References

Baum, D. and Wells, C.L. (1985) Promoting handicap awareness in preschool children. Teaching Exceptional Children, Summer, 282-287.

Bricker, D. D. (1989). Early intervention for at-risk and handicapped infants, toddlers, and preschool children (2nd ed.). Palo Alto, CA: VORT.

Bricker, D., & Sheehan, R. (1981). Effectiveness of an early intervention program as indexed by child change. Journal of the Division for Early Childhood, 4, 11-27.

Edgar, E., Heggelund, M., & Fischer, M. (1988). A longitudinal study of graduates of special education preschools: Educational placements after preschool. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 8(3), 61-74.

Edgar, E., McNulty, B., Gaetz, J., & Maddox, M. (1984). Educational placements of graduates of preschool programs for handicapped children. Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 4(3), 19-29.

Guralnick, J.H., & Bennett, F. C. (Eds.). (1987). The effectiveness of early intervention for at-risk and handicapped children. Orlando, FL: Academic Press.

Lazzari, A. M., & Bruder, M. B. (1988). Teacher evaluation practices in early childhood special education. Journal for the Division of Early Childhood, 12, 238-244.

Rosenberg, S., & Robinson, C. (1988). Interactions of parents with their young handicapped children. In S. Odom & M. Karnes (Eds.), Early intervention for infants and children with handicaps. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

Wood, M. E. (1981). Costs of intervention programs. In C. Garland, N.W. Stone, J. Swanson, & G. Woodruff (Eds.), Early intervention for children with special needs and the families: Findings and recommendations (pp. 15-25). WESTAR Series Paper No. 11). Seattle: University of Washington.

Table 1. Gender and Ethnicity of New Mexico Preschool Graduates

Gender	Percentage
Male	66%
Female	34%

****

Ethnicity	Percentage
Caucasian	47
Black	2
Hispanic	41
Asian	1
Native American	9

Table 2. First Placement by Preschool Handicap for Each Cohort (New Mexico)

Category	Graduating Cohort				
	1987	1988	1989	1990	Total
Children with Mild Mental Handicaps					
Reg	0	0	1	1	2 (2%)
Reg S (A & B Levels)	2	6	3	2	13 (12%)
Sp	19	23	26	18	86 (80%)
Other	2	1	2	2	7 (6%)
Total	23	30	32	23	108 (7%)
Children with Mild Handicaps (BD, CD, LD)					
Reg	18	29	37	39	123 (13%)
Reg S (A & B Levels)	79	118	181	151	529 (55%)
Sp	44	54	81	53	232 (24%)
Other	13	15	21	21	70 (7%)
Total	154	216	320	264	954 (59%)
Children with Other Handicaps					
Reg	10	5	8	12	35 (6%)
Reg S (A & B Levels)	19	27	37	21	104 (19%)
Sp	75	111	123	65	374 (68%)
Other	8	8	10	13	39 (7%)
Total	112	151	178	111	552 (34%)
Total	289	397	530	398	1,614

Note. Reg = Regular education placement; Reg S = Regular education with support; Sp = Special education placement.

Table 3. Current Placement of Students by Handicapping Conditions (New Mexico)

Handicapping Condition	Level of Special Education Services					Total
	A Level	B Level	C Level	D Level	Reg 1	
Behaviorally Disordered	1	3	2	9	3	18
Communication Disordered	103	111	32	103	13	362
Gifted	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hearing Impaired	21	6	1	3	0	12
Learning Disabled	1	9	8	15	2	35
Mentally Handicapped Mild	3	2	14	44	4	67
Mentally Handicapped Moderate	0	0	4	29	0	33
Mentally Handicapped Severe/Profound	0	0	0	10	0	10
Multiply Impaired	4	6	3	141	0	154
Physically Impaired	11	20	8	26	3	68
Visually Impaired	0	1	0	2	0	3
Not Handicapped	0	0	0	0	102	102
TOTAL	125	158	72	382	127	864

New Mexico School Districts

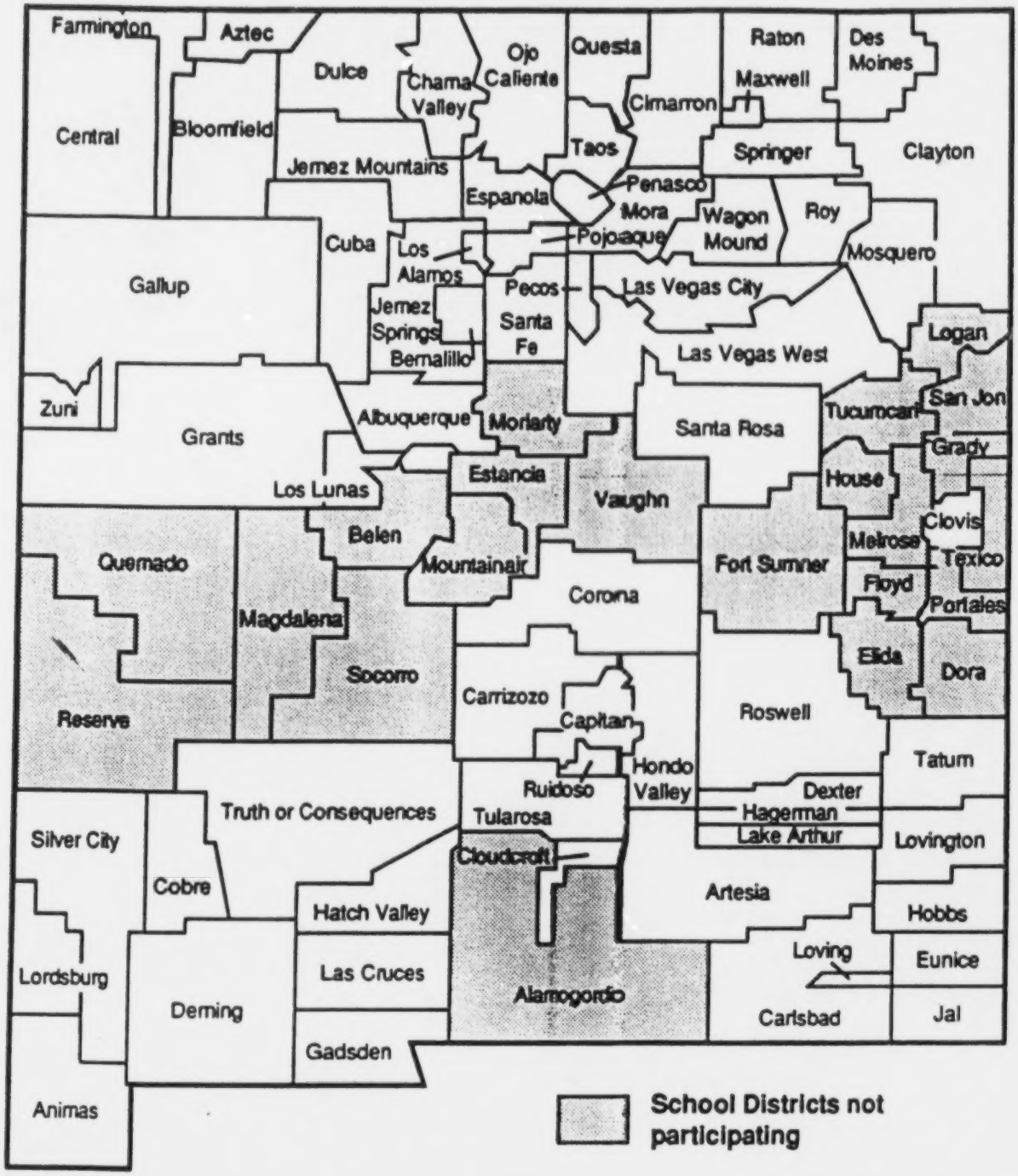

Figure 1

New Mexico DD Preschool Graduates by Year*

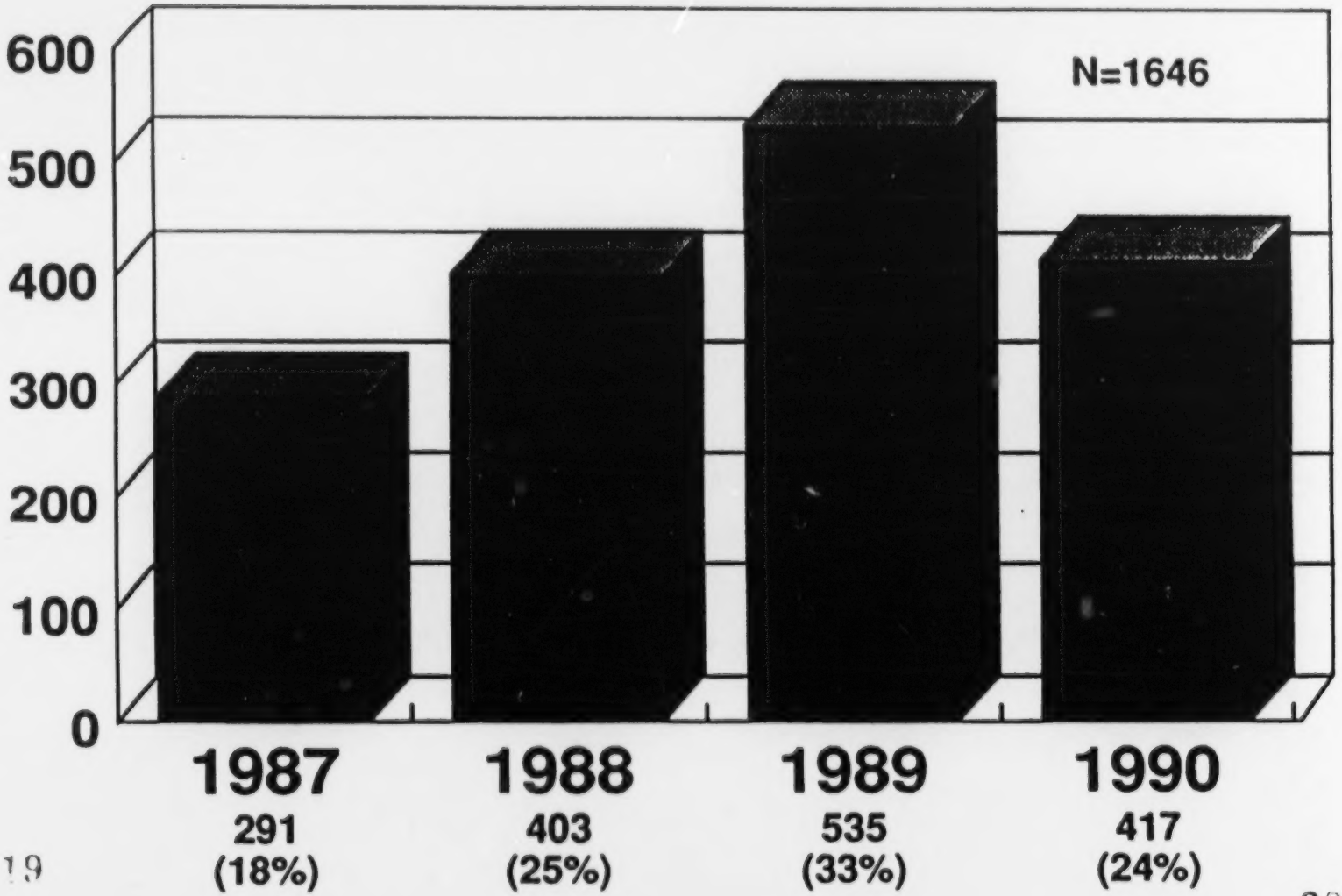

Figure 2

*In participating districts

Current Placements for 1990

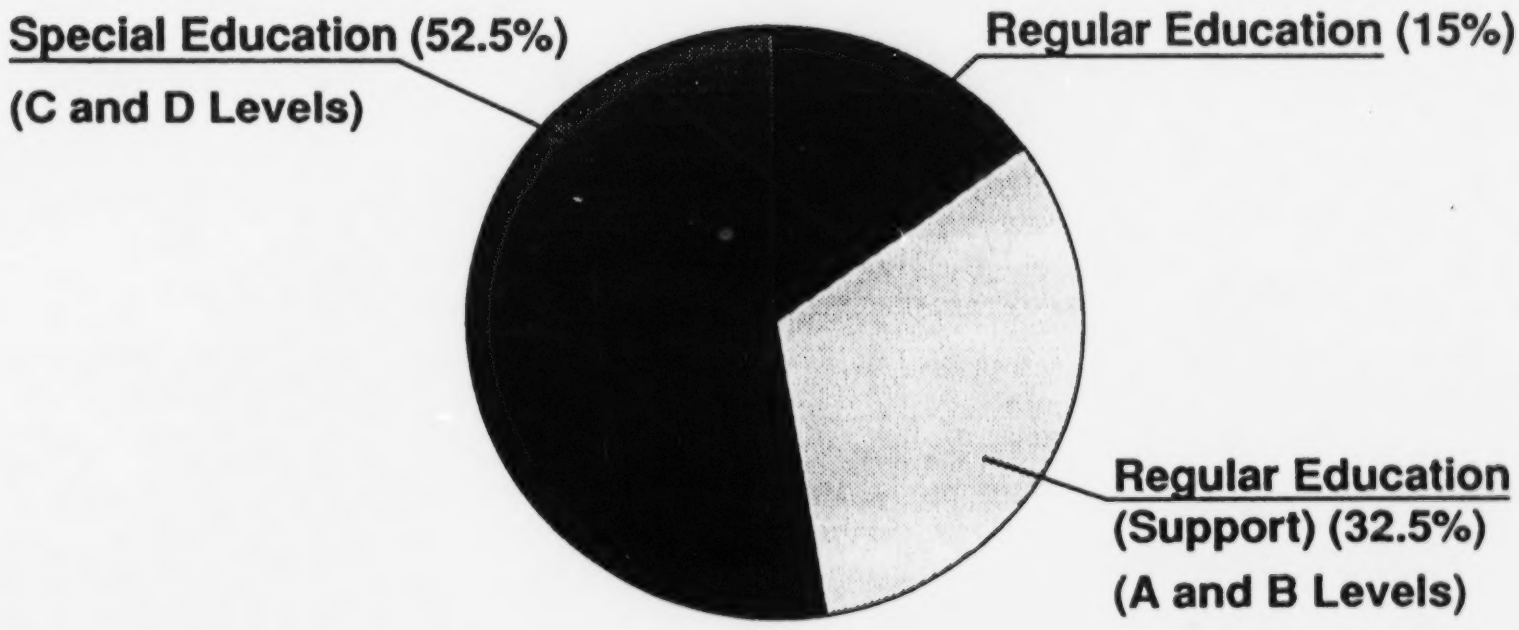

Figure 3

Current Placements for 1990

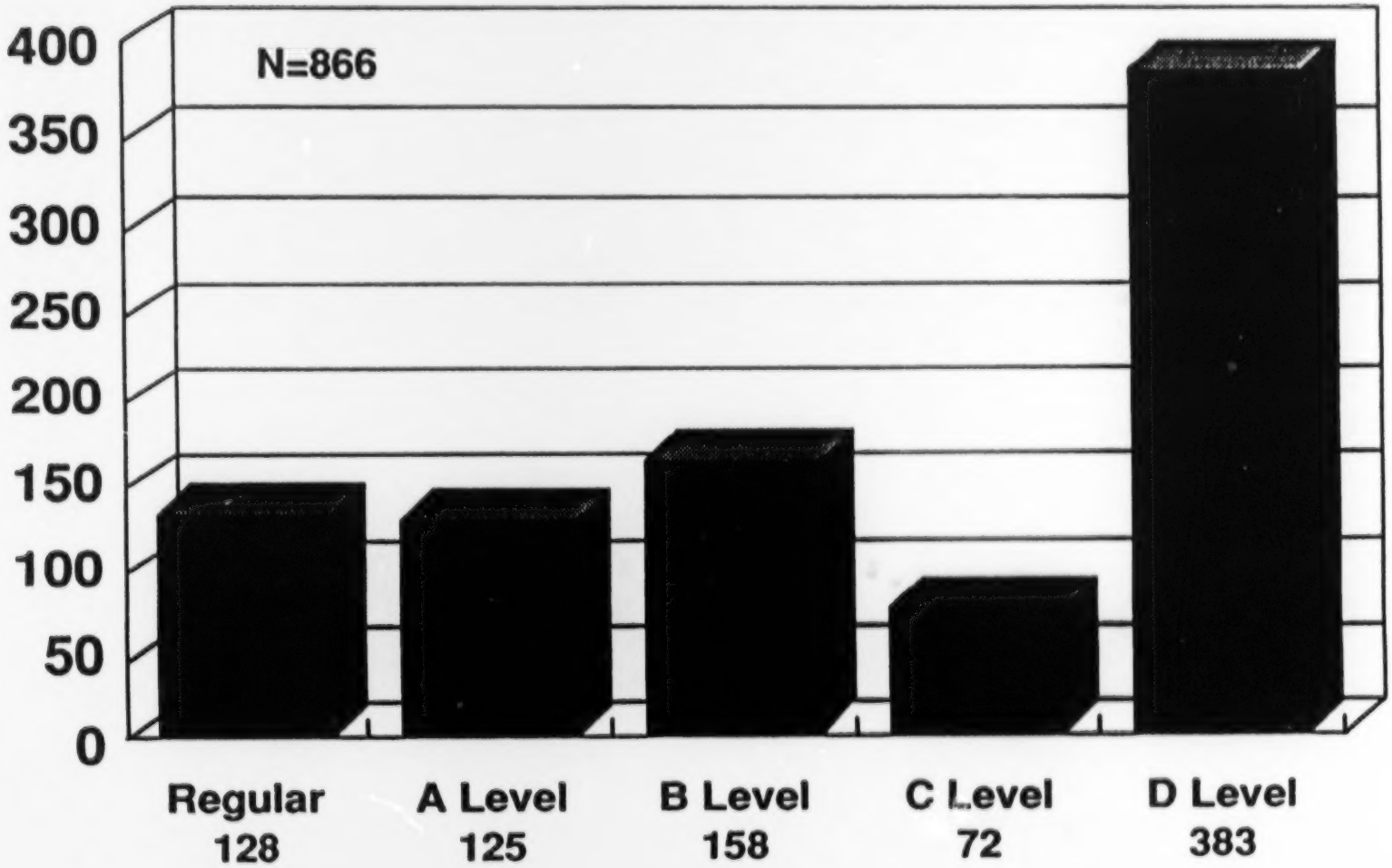

Figure 4

Type of Public Special Education Preschools

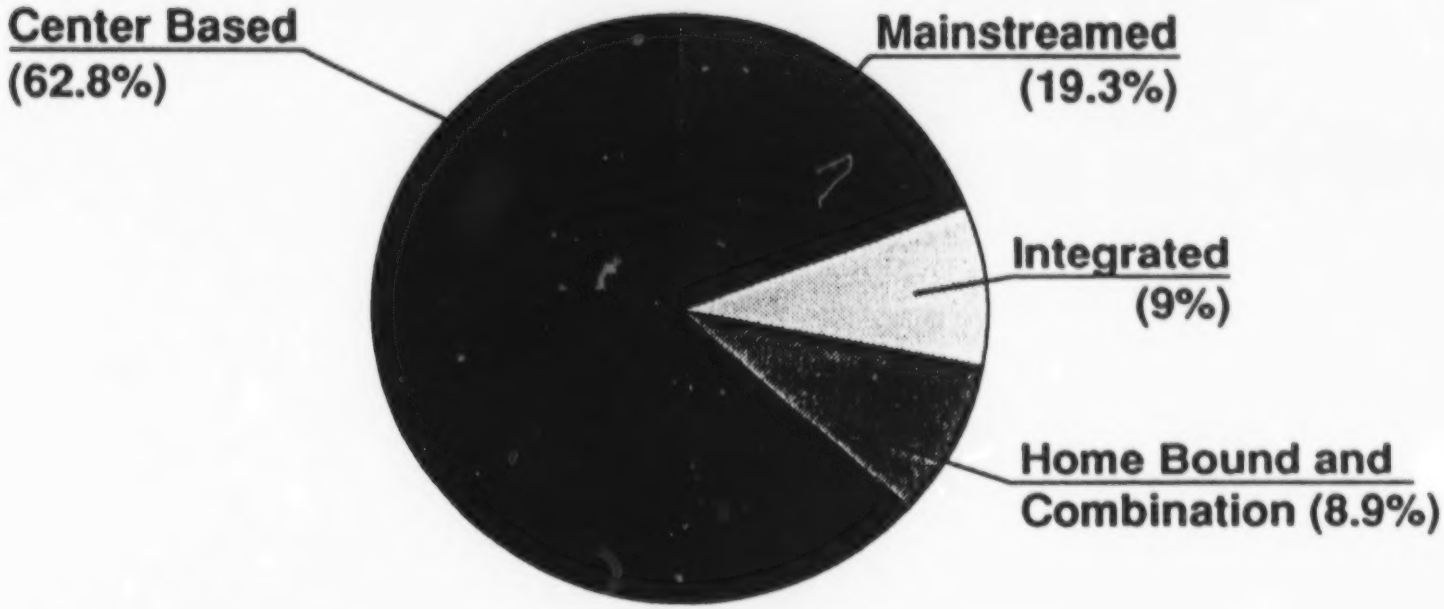

Figure 5